



# The Libby Story: EPA'S Ongoing Commitment to the Libby Cleanup

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This fact sheet describes EPA's progress cleaning up the Libby Superfund site and the Agency's commitment to the Libby community as they face unprecedented human health and environmental issues.

**History of Libby.** The Libby Asbestos site is located in the northwest corner of Montana in Lincoln County, 35 miles east of Idaho and 65 miles south of Canada. The site includes the rural towns of Libby and Troy. In the 1920s, the Zonolite Company formed and began mining vermiculite at a mine seven miles northeast of Libby.

In 1963, W.R. Grace bought Zonolite's mining operations and operated the mine until it closed in 1990. W. R. Grace's mining and processing operations resulted in wide-spread asbestos contamination in and around the town of Libby. Many residents and workers who were exposed to the contamination developed asbestos related disease.

EPA has been working in Libby since November 1999 when an Emergency Response Team was sent to investigate local concerns about asbestos-contaminated vermiculite. In October 2002, the area affected by the vermiculite mine was added to EPA's National Priorities List or NPL.

In June 2009, EPA declared the Agency's first public health emergency under Superfund at the Site. The Public Health Emergency recognizes the urgent nature of the health impacts from Libby Amphibole asbestos (LA) contamination in Libby and Troy.



## Ongoing Progress at Libby

**Commitment to Cleanup.** EPA is continuing to aggressively clean up the Site. EPA has invested approximately \$370 million in the cleanup of the Libby and Troy area. During the 2011 construction season,

the Agency plans to perform approximately 150 residential and commercial removals in the community, which will employ about 175 people.

As of October 2010, EPA had conducted removals on 1,463 commercial and residential properties in Libby. The Montana Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) has conducted removals at 84 properties in Troy. Over 22,100 cubic yards of vermiculite attic insulation, 43,160 cubic yards of contaminated construction debris and 825,000 cubic yards of asbestos-contaminated soil have been safely removed from the Libby and Troy area.

**Substantial Risk Reduction.** The most recent ambient air quality report, published in 2009, indicates that LA air concentrations are approximately 10,000 times lower than the reported air concentrations in downtown Libby before the mine and milling plants shutdown in 1990. There is much less asbestos contamination in Libby than there was 10 years ago; however, there are still potential risks from exposure to asbestos. That is why EPA is using a combined approach of "action" (indoor and outdoor cleanups at targeted properties) and "investigations" that will support final remedy decisions.

**Cleanup Settlement.** In most cases, the company responsible for the contamination, W.R. Grace, which owns the vermiculite mine site, would implement the cleanup at all areas of the site. However, from the onset, W.R. Grace was extremely uncooperative. EPA had to sue them to get access to the mine. In addition, the company filed for bankruptcy which complicated efforts to get them to do the work. In 2008, W.R. Grace settled with EPA for past and future response costs (except for OU3, the mine site); therefore, EPA is doing the cleanup work at all areas of the Site except the mine using settlement money.

EPA received \$250 million as part of the bankruptcy settlement, to cover past and future cleanup costs at the Site, exclusive of the mine. This is the largest civil cash settlement in Superfund history. As of February 2011, there remains approximately \$136 million in settlement funds.

**School Cleanup Activities.** All Libby schools have been tested and cleaned. Soil removal actions were carried out at all public schools in Libby in 2002. Additional soil and interior removal actions were also

performed at playgrounds, the running track, the football field (including the storage area for football and track equipment that EPA replaced), driveways, a shot-put area and building insulation. EPA places a high priority on protecting school children and school employees from exposure to even low levels of uncontained asbestos.

**School Sampling Results.** In 2009, EPA collected air, soil, and activity based samples at five schools. Sampling results showed a reduction in asbestos levels from high levels in 2001 to only trace amounts in 2009. Out of 51 indoor air samples that were taken in four classrooms, a cafeteria, a gymnasium, and four hallways, there were only 2 samples with very low detections. Outdoor activity-based sampling simulated student activities such as playing on a swing set, playing sports such as football, baseball, soccer and running, and simulated ground worker activities such as digging, raking, sweeping and mowing. Only five low-level detections were found out of 63 samples, indicating that air quality has significantly improved. Soil sampling at the schools has also reduced contamination where asbestos previously measured in percent levels is not detectable or only seen in trace amounts since EPA began work at the site.

**Long-term Protection.** In 2010, EPA announced two Records of Decision that outline the selected remedies for the former Export Plant (now Riverfront Park) and Screening Plant, paving the way for these properties to be cleaned up and returned to productive reuse. Land-use controls will also play an important role in minimizing the potential for exposures to contamination and protection of the remedy.

**Naturally Occurring Background Asbestos.** EPA is studying the natural background levels of asbestos in the Libby valley. Background levels refer to LA that occurs naturally from geological processes and not from mining or human-related activities. Understanding the amount of soil background levels will help us understand how much asbestos resulted from human-related activities, like mining, in Libby.

**Proactive Community Engagement.** EPA maintains a centrally located storefront information center in Libby, and MDEQ maintains a center in Troy. The information centers provide easy access to documents and one-on-one contact with staff. EPA utilizes various outreach tools (i.e. fact sheets, community interviews, etc.), maintains a website ([www.epa.gov/libby](http://www.epa.gov/libby)) and holds public meetings to keep the community informed of the cleanup activities. EPA also provides support to the Libby Community Advisory Group (CAG), which serves as a focal point

for the exchange of information and funds a Technical Assistance Grant (TAG) to allow a local group to hire an independent contractor to review technical documents and offer input into Agency decisions.

**Environmental Resource Specialist.** In 2006, EPA started a full-time position called the Environmental Resource Specialist (ERS). The specialist provides advice and performs cleanups should the community encounter asbestos-containing vermiculite. The ERS received 184 calls in 2009 and 112 calls in 2010. In 2010, the ERS also received 170 project-related calls for the Lincoln County U-Dig Service which gives information about residual subsurface contamination and buried utilities before excavation projects begin.

**Training Opportunities.** EPA offers free asbestos removal/abatement training to local contractors, firefighters and tradespersons. The main focus of the training is to teach the participants how to identify vermiculite, and what to do if they encounter vermiculite or LA during the normal course of their work. The 40 hour Contractor/Supervisor training also qualifies the student to become a state-licensed Asbestos Abatement Contractor.

**Economic Redevelopment.** EPA signed a cooperative agreement with Lincoln County and the Lincoln County Port Authority to assist in land-use planning at the former Stimson Mill site to explore reuse opportunities. EPA expedited the cleanup at a portion of this site to accommodate a new manufacturing facility at that location.

## Planning for a Better Tomorrow

While EPA's ongoing cleanup efforts have greatly reduced exposures in the Libby area, there still exists a risk to public health from actual and potential releases. EPA is committed to protecting public health and the environment by reducing exposure to LA. EPA will continue to work closely with our federal, state, and local partners as cleanup efforts progress. The cleanup activities in Libby, Montana are one of the Agency's highest priorities and will remain a top priority in the years ahead.

*For additional information about the Libby Site, please visit EPA's website at [www.epa.gov/libby/](http://www.epa.gov/libby/) or contact:*

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